

Qualitative Research Project Plan

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Introduction

Hello! Our company, Harmonium, strives to inspire and encourage organizations to create mental health solutions.

In this qualitative research, we sought to explore how employees' mental wellbeing is affected by the workplace. By doing this research, we are seeking clarity on what services and programs to provide.



Method

- Conducted 5 qualitative interviews with people we knew prior.
 - Our target audience: people who struggle with mental health in the workplace.
- 4 conducted remote and 1 conducted on site.
- Each interview was recorded, transcribed, and coded.
(to search for common patterns & themes)



Participants

- Kay (62) is an admin in the pharmaceutical industry
- Jake (32) is currently unemployed and previously worked in a warehouse
- Mary (29) works in the corporate fashion industry
- Terry (49) is a family advocate at a Sexual Trauma Recover Service
- Alex (22) is a server, food runner, and busser at a restaurant

We had a diverse group of 5 participants with ages ranging from 22-62 years old.



Location

- New York, NY (remote)
- Tempe, AZ (on site)
- Louisville, KY (remote)
- Portland, OR (remote)
- Indianapolis, IN (remote)

Thanks to our geographically diverse business group, we were able to interview people from all over the U.S.



Interview Guide

Interview Guide

Introduction

First, I would like to thank you for participating in this interview. As stated before, we are interested in understanding the relationship between work and people's mental health. So your insight is valuable and we appreciate you taking time out of your day to speak with us.

Throughout this interview, I would like to focus on your past or current experiences. As well as, how your work experiences or work environment has affected your overall well-being. So please be open and honest and know there is no wrong answer.

To go over a few housekeeping details, I'd like to remind you that this interview should take no longer than an hour, though that can vary on how much we talk. Also, all our participants will remain anonymous, so if any quotes are shared no one will know who said them. Lastly, I would like to acknowledge that talking about mental health is a sensitive topic and can bring up a lot of different emotions. If you do not want to answer a certain question, please remember that this interview is voluntary and you can opt-out at any time.

Now before we move forward, I would like to know if I have your consent to record the audio from this interview? This recording will not be shared with anyone. It simply allows me to focus on what you're saying instead of taking notes while we chat. You have my guarantee that the recording will be deleted when I am done.

Questions to ask participants:

1. Tell me about your job.
2. Can you describe a time when your mental health was affected at work. (How was it resolved?)
3. Have you ever sought out mental health advice/help? (Are you currently enrolled in a program or service?)
4. Describe obstacles in seeking mental health help.
5. How do you feel about the support resources your employer provides?
6. Describe the morale and environment of your workplace. (What contributes to it?)
7. Explain how your mental health is impacted by your coworkers. (What about management?)
8. Tell me about a time you took a day off for mental health reasons. (Why not?)



Key Findings

During our research, we found several common themes when discussing mental health in the workplace:

1. Lack of managerial support
2. Tangible obstacles
3. Intangible obstacles
4. Personal deterrents
5. Workplace improvement



Managerial (un)Support

Many of our participants felt a disconnect from management:

- Participants feel like they take on manager responsibilities
 - Results in stress and the feeling of 'wearing too many hats'
- Participants also feel like most managers don't care about their emotional well-being
 - Words to describe management included 'issue', 'spotty', 'no resolution'



Supportive Data (Quotes)

"I think a lot of the issue is the way management brings up concerns and tries to correct people on the job... I feel like they don't do it very well... They'll just hyperfocus on what you're doing and pick on the parts of your job that don't really matter"

- Alex

There was just a lack of care I felt coming from the people who were above me [managers] you know?"

-Mary

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Tangible Obstacles

Our participants expressed a variety of tangible concerns that may have stopped them from seeking mental health help.

This includes:

- Expenses
 - Insurance, Out-of-network costs
- Transportation
 - Not reliable or private; Therapists may be sparse in rural areas
- Time
 - Working overtime means less time for personal needs
- Work Environment/Culture
 - Each participant expressed individual concerns about morale



Supportive Data (Quotes)

"So I feel like price is a huge thing. And then also just making the whole process less taxing on someone, because I mean, we're all adults, if you are seeking mental health services, you're already struggling"

-Mary

"It was a toxic working environment, just based on the personalities that I worked with. And there wasn't a heavy focus on the well-being of everyone in the office. We were kind of overworked"

-Mary

"That was huge, getting a ride consistently, you know, lining up the schedule of the people who would give me rides to my therapist."

-Jake

"For the most part, people just come in and they fucking hate it there... They're just like 'I don't want to be here, I'm being overworked and underpaid and I don't feel respected'"

-Alex

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Intangible Obstacles

Although most companies provide mental health/wellness resources, our participants faced obstacles when trying to use them.

- Participants used work-provided resources like:
 - Process and Improvement Board
 - Wellness Wheel
 - Support groups, events, and workshops
- Participants expressed **fear** around using resources in anticipation of social stigma, shame, and blame



Supportive Data (Quotes)

"I ended up working that entire weekend. So my mental health was completely affected, but yeah, that was probably a moment in which my mental health and morale was very very low"

-Mary

"It's [process and improvement board] is just like a faux. It's like an illusion that you have a say in what's going on in the workplace" -

-Alex

"The shame of what was done to me, it's my fault. I don't want to go to council because then everybody knows those kinds of things are a shame."

-Terri



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Personal Deterrents

In their everyday lives, participants feel the effects of trauma they've experienced from their work environment

- Physical and emotional exhaustion
 - Trying to relax outside work is difficult for some participants
- Generational challenges perpetuate substance abuse, or violence as coping mechanisms
 - Familial and personal changes prohibit participants from working effectively



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Supportive Data (Quotes)

"In my downtime, I'm trying to read, but when you go to work, the stress doesn't go away. It increases significantly and mental health gets worse. So when I get off, it's hard to relax and it's hard to unwind and try to find that focus and find that time"

-Jake

"I just broke down and I had to go on the elevator and go outside and just cry"

-Mary

"When I took mental health days, I would exercise. I would rest, I would take walks, I would go outside. I would try and be in nature as much as I could. Go to the park, or see a loved one if I could. And a lot of times I would just watch a comfort show and do things for myself"

-Mary

"I walked by the trash room and halfway opened the door onto the street and tried to breathe a little... Basically I was really uncomfortable"

-Alex

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Next Steps (How We Can Help)

Our participants shared personal stories of how the workplace affects their wellbeing.

- Seeking solace
 - We intend to implement 'safe spaces' for anyone who needs a step back from corporate culture
- Coping Mechanisms
 - We will take skills our participants used to care for their mental wellbeing and implement them into the workplace structure



Thank you!



Appendix

- Affinity Diagram:
<https://www.figma.com/file/HEyGAfON0KuGZcHCMmcqZk/Affinity-Diagram---Interview-Compilation>
- Analyzed Findings:
https://docs.google.com/document/d/1NEIk57x1KJp_db6lvRyS8NLPLmhXvyMWGsobZV48DUc/edit
- Empathy Maps:
<https://www.figma.com/file/yy51MvDXiilk4MLB5oLUc0/Empathy-Maps>
- Interview Guide:
https://knowledge-transfer.sharepoint.com/:w:/s/TeamC/EZb24ulZEGlBmjyisEO7qFgB6ubdG24_5eYUeu0qXevSKA?e=nDwoJ5
- Interview Questions:
<https://www.figma.com/file/OAg6k2wtclQJKlyD5vaUDF/Research-Project>
- Podcast:
<https://open.spotify.com/episode/3lqchNE10miAPNBU7A6IKW?si=A0eSu46vSVe-Pw9hO9-Ctw>
- Transcriptions:
<https://knowledge-transfer.sharepoint.com/:f:/s/TeamC/EgtrZPczNZpltE8bofWfiwsBRhxUmdljpuwMRDfdcWydQQ?e=0avz92>

